

Setting Expectations for How Staff Approach Their Work

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Communicating expectations about how staff approach their work is a big part of performance management—and a chance for managers to mitigate bias that creeps in when we leave things unsaid or fall back on “that’s just how we do things here.” To be successful in their role, staff need to understand *how* you expect them to approach their work (mindset, behaviors, values), just as clearly as they understand *what* they’re responsible for achieving (goals, results), and the technical skills required for the job.

That’s why we make approach a core part of [Role Expectations](#), and a foundational part of the [must-haves](#) we test for at [every stage](#) of the hiring process.

Getting Clear about the *How*—and checking for bias

Managers should examine [preferences and traditions](#), get clear on what’s really required to succeed in the role, build alignment with your staff up front, and check in regularly about this part of their role. Most importantly, you want to make sure you’re holding all staff members to similar standards.

- What mindsets will most help the staff member succeed in the role, the team, and the organization?
- What competencies, values, or behaviors will be a core part of performance evaluation?
- What conditions will the person face and what mindsets or practices will help them through common hurdles?
- What approaches are necessary to advance your organizational/team commitment to equity, inclusion, and belonging? How should this person put these values into practice in their role?
- How do these approaches make room for a diverse range of communication and work styles, while setting a clear, consistent bar for success?

Communicating Expectations About Approach

Here are some examples of approaches. No need to use them all (unless you want an overwhelmed employee!). Think carefully about the **3-5 main approaches** that are particularly key to succeeding in the role, team, or organization. Reflect on the [competencies](#) you defined when you hired for the role, and use those to inform the [Role Expectations](#).

- **Attentive, empathetic leadership:** As our first point of contact for [staff, volunteers, students], you make sure every single person feels welcome and has a role to play. You empathize with the communities we serve and put people at ease, especially when there are lines of difference or power. You listen to understand people’s needs and take steps based on that input.
- **Equity at the center:** You recognize ways that race and other identities intersect in the work, especially with communities we serve. You identify potential for bias and actively work to minimize inequities in [work products, decisions, policies, processes].
- **Continuous learning:** There’s always more to know out there, and you’re hungry for it. You absorb information from your colleagues, your work, and from keeping up with your field. If something doesn’t make sense, you ask questions until it does, and you apply what you learn in your work.
- **High volume, high efficiency:** We’re pretty busy here, and your job is to make it easy for our team members to do their jobs. You maintain systems for keeping tasks from slipping through the cracks. You’re able to juggle competing demands and prioritize without sacrificing quality. You get back to people in a timely manner and take pride in providing clear, helpful information.
- **Attention to detail:** You aim to leave things better than you found them. As the owner of our [database, website, etc.], you notice and fix errors that others might overlook. When mistakes happen (which they will!), you address them quickly and look for ways to prevent similar errors.
- **Initiative and ingenuity:** You leverage resources creatively to solve problems and dive right in to take a concept from idea to implementation. You often consult with others, but you can also propose solutions in the best interest of the [school, campaign, organization] and get things rolling without much guidance.
- **Ownership and resilience:** You care deeply about getting results. You gather information, seek input, and drive work forward to the finish line. You think 3 (or 30) steps ahead to develop solutions, anticipate problems, and course-correct when needed. You hold a high bar even

when things are hectic and bounce back from setbacks by turning each hurdle into a learning opportunity.

- **Relationship-building:** Part of your job is connecting with people from many different backgrounds. You find (and even create) opportunities to deepen connections and build authentic, mutual relationships with [teammates, donors, members, families] across lines of difference, such as race or other identities. You truly welcome viewpoints that differ from your own, and you're able to "sit with" discomfort when people express themselves in ways that aren't familiar to you.
- **Adaptability and problem solving:** You are always ready to take advantage of unexpected opportunities and address obstacles. You look for the root of both simple and complex problems, so you can seek solutions. You approach work with a spirit of "yes" and adapt as things change, which they often do.
- **Strategist's mind:** You quickly grasp the subtleties of complex issues and identify patterns in challenges. You don't stop at diagnosing problems, though; you come up with insightful, pragmatic, equitable, and sustainable ways to produce positive change.
- **Inclusive leadership:** You approach leadership with a mindset of "power with" rather than "power over." You recognize the value of divergent perspectives and regularly include others in planning and decision-making. You build equity and inclusion into goals and plans for staff development, retention, strategy, and culture. As the lead on [area, policy, campaign], you will sometimes make difficult decisions in the best interest of the organization. When needed, you're able to weigh complex factors and communicate tough decisions with clarity and empathy.
- **Coaching and modeling:** You make it your mission to develop others. You delegate skillfully and take the time to offer useful and actionable feedback. Because you lead by example (with our values as your north star), you inspire and motivate others to take action and meet goals. You hold the team accountable in ways that grow the people and our impact, and you make sure people feel appreciated.
- **Spirit of possibilities:** You firmly believe that we can all do things we've never done before, and can stretch ourselves to achieve incredible results. You maintain an optimistic outlook and always look for ways to make ideas work before assuming they won't.

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